



Statement of Principles on Participatory Development

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November 16, 1993

There is nothing more basic to the development process than participation. That is a lesson we have learned over the years, but it is one that we have not fully appreciated in all of its implications.

First, broad access by people to their country's economy and participation in their society's decisionmaking processes are results we seek to support; they are fundamental to sustained development; and

Second, our support is more likely to lead to these results if the development programs are relevant to people's needs, and for this there needs to be broad participation by people in defining development priorities and approaches.

Participation, therefore, describes both the end and the means; both the kind of results we seek, and the way that we, as providers of development and humanitarian assistance, must nurture those results.

The ends and the means are closely related. For our scarce funds to contribute meaningfully to the goal of sustainable development--to development that broadens economic, social, and political access and enables a society to keep improving the quality of life for its people--the development approaches themselves must be sustainable. They must be consistent with the priorities and values of those who will have to sustain the effort after the donor has left. This is true for a village-level project, and it is true for a national-level program. It applies to policy reforms as well. The policy changes that may be needed to open up economies to innovation and local investment must be supported by sufficient social consensus and a sense of shared sacrifice, or they will not be sustained.

Development assistance works best when it contributes to efforts that people in the recipient society are already attempting to carry out, and when it fully takes into account the priorities and values of affected groups.

The efficiency of this approach has been shown repeatedly, whether we look at the local level of a water-user association, or consider the degree of social consensus that a national government must count on to carry out and sustain changes in policy or social and economic programs.

Studies have shown this. Our experience at USAID has demonstrated it, through both the successes and failures of our efforts. Private foundations, the Inter-American and African Development Foundations, and private development assistance organizations around the world have learned it. Other bilateral and multilateral donors are learning it.

How are we to know whether such consensus exists, or can perhaps be brought about, or whether a given program truly matches local priorities and values? The answer is, we must build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved.

We sometimes do this very well, particularly at the community level, for example by using participative planning techniques in rural development programs. We will do this more consistently.

We will now build opportunities for participation into development processes at all levels--from community-level projects to the design of USAID's country strategies.

In short, democratizing the development process will be the cornerstone of our approach.

The fact is, unless development assistance is informed by local realities and the people who experience them daily, it will very rarely succeed. Unless policy reforms and other major national commitments are perceived as serving a broad national interest, they will be difficult to sustain.

The reason for this is quite simple. It is their country, not ours. It is their community, not ours. We can advise, we can assist, and we can choose not to assist, but the decisions about development priorities and policies must be reached by that society at large, not by us. It is they who bear the risk; they must make the commitment. Providers of development assistance--whether a well-meaning private voluntary group inadvertently imposing an inappropriate cultural style, or whether a panel of prestigious international experts prescribing policy changes from a vantage point far removed from the particular political and social environment--fail if we forget that it is their country, not ours.

Let us start with that basic truth, therefore, as we construct a development approach based on participation--one that democratizes the development process. Our approach will be oriented by these guiding principles:

1. We will listen to the voices of ordinary people--especially to people whose voices tend to be stifled by more powerful groups in their societies--as we try to discern national and local priorities. This will mean encouraging governments to consult affected populations and to provide them seats at the table so that these groups might represent local reality and their own interests during the course of a development program. It will also mean developing and maintaining direct channels of communication between USAID and groups representing a wide range of views and interests in the society.
2. In defining our strategies at a country level and in pursuit of our global objectives, we will aim to support the initiatives of indigenous communities and organizations. We will seek to understand what is already happening, what particular opportunities exist for USAID to contribute to development processes for which there is well-rooted local support. Our assistance--whether directed in support of national programs or channeled to specific local projects--will aim to complement the social energies and commitments shown by the recipient society.

That does not mean our aid cannot support new ideas, or ideas that are new to a given society. It does mean that we must first strive to ensure that the new idea is fully "owned" by legitimate indigenous institutions and that people who will be affected have a voice in how it is applied.

Nor does it mean that USAID should not have its own priorities. We must and we do: our priorities are set forth in the strategy documents for our four areas of concentration, and our severely limited resources will prevent us from supporting many worthy endeavors. It does mean, however, that we will seek to understand local priorities independently of our own priorities, capabilities, and resources.

3. We will cast widely for expertise. The technical expertise available to USAID in many areas is world-class, and our technical assistance is often of greater value to recipient countries than the material resources we can offer. However, we will not be satisfied with our technical analysis until we have opened it to debate by a range of experts in the universities and research institutions of the recipient country and by other qualified experts in donor agencies.

Moreover, we will routinely and systematically test our expert analysis against the reality experienced by affected populations. To this end, we will develop appropriate ways in each country context to consult with organizations representing the interests of small-scale farmers and businesspeople, slum dwellers, fishing communities, tribal groups, poor women, professional associations, environmental, charitable, and development PVOs, and other people whose experience provides a needed reality check on the assumptions and prescriptions of outside experts.

This does not mean that we will expect to find harmony among the views of local experts. We will sometimes find more conflict than consensus among the perspectives of indigenous communities and interest groups. We will, however, recognize that competition among a plethora of interests lies at the heart of the democratic process. To the extent appropriate to our role as an outsider, we will strive to make that competition more open and fair, and thereby create as broad a view of the national interest as possible.

4. We will assure that USAID projects and programs are accountable to the end user. That will mean, for example, that a health sector project under which municipal governments receive training materials, family planning services, and other support from U.S. private agencies will have some mechanism to permit the clients--in this case, the municipal governments--to tell USAID whether the services received from these PVOs meet their needs. It will also mean that the woman receiving the family planning service has some say over the way those services are delivered in her community.
5. We will ensure that projects we support strengthen the capacity of the poor to take the next steps in their own and their community's development. That is, in all our efforts--not just those aimed explicitly to promote our democracy objective--we will seek to empower the poor to sustain the development process. Sometimes this will be as simple as, for example, in a project aimed at training village health workers, providing opportunities for these health workers to meet, get to know each other, and thereby begin to identify common concerns and, perhaps, to initiate further efforts to improve local sanitation and health conditions.
6. To overcome the tendency of projects to benefit only local elites, we will use gender analysis and techniques for data collection and consensus building such as participative rural appraisal (PRA). PRA is a development planning methodology that helps the different groups and institutions in a given community to agree on a common course of action and to take an active role in organizing the inputs of the various outside agencies.
7. We will find ways to streamline our procedures for approving and amending projects so as to allow the local reality to drive our programs, rather than to have our procedures drive our definition of local reality. Too often in the past, we in the development business have acquired a stake in a project we have designed and our procedures make it difficult to modify. Sustainable development means that the local recipients have the only stake that counts.
8. We will keep our focus on results--on the results experienced by real people in the recipient societies--rather than merely on tracking the material inputs to projects and our adherence to our own procedures. We will not lessen our commitment to accountability for the taxpayers' dollars nor our adherence to legal requirements. However, we must satisfy our need for accountability in ways that do not prevent us from achieving the results that will affect people.
9. We will practice a respectful partnership with indigenous and American or international private organizations, ranging from non-profit development institutions to professional associations and businesses, that collaborate with us in providing development and humanitarian assistance. We will work with those that are committed to strengthening institutions and empowering people in the recipient society. Our partnership means that we will listen to our partners' views and will work together in ways that reflect our complementary strengths. We recognize the uniquely American values and experience that U.S. PVOs offer, as well as their considerable range of skills and expertise. At the same time, we will not lose sight of the objective of strengthening indigenous institutions and capabilities, and will seek ways to expand

our support to indigenous organizations and to facilitate the sharing of experience and expertise among them.

10. We will take the measures necessary to equip ourselves to make good on these principles. This will not be easy. We will need, for example, to find ways for Mission staff to spend more time out of the capital cities, and more time in meaningful dialogue with a wide range of local groups. This will mean streamlining our procedures so as to relieve already overburdened staff of some of the work they currently do.

We will seek ways to empower USAID's own personnel, in the Missions as well as at AID/W, unleashing their innovation and creativity in finding better ways to serve our clients in the recipient societies.

We will strengthen relevant skills and aptitudes in our staff and contractors--stronger language and cultural skills, skills in discerning social processes, gender analysis and other techniques to enhance participation, skills in dealing with conflicting interests and, where possible, in enhancing awareness by local groups of a broader national interest. We will find ways to address this need in our personnel policies and practices.

We will consider realistically the costs of applying a participatory approach to our work. Many measures will involve little or no cost, and some may save money and mobilize larger amounts of local resources. Nevertheless, it takes time and resources to consult broadly, and the consultative process can sometimes be slow. We will ensure that these costs are outweighed by the benefits of focusing our development resources more securely on the priorities of the recipient society.

I have asked the Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination to make these principles central to their work in defining the Agency's priorities and procedures. We will enlist the help of many interested staff from all Bureaus, as well as from the Missions, in helping to develop guidelines for the implementation of these principles. Your assistance will be needed in finding ways to overcome the obstacles to participation, both in the field and in USAID's own procedures.

The principles I have outlined will place USAID squarely on the cutting edge of change. This is where I and, I believe, the American people want us to be. We will have learned the lessons that development professionals around the world are learning: development is a people process, and our efforts must aim to support the efforts of local people. That way we will show real, lasting results.
